

# THE EU INTEGRATED APPROACH TO FOOD SAFETY

In recent years, agriculture in Europe has performed remarkably well, keeping pace with the rapid population growth. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) was initially created to support production and overcome the food shortages which came about as a consequence of the Second World War. On the other hand, this improvement occurred at the expense of more rural areas, with natural resources being increasingly exploited and exposed to more pollution. The CAP has in fact redirected its money towards rural development rather than direct subsidisation of production. **By Brenda Azzopardi.**

With the world's population approaching 10 billion people, our planet might find itself in a critical situation. Many of us have repeatedly heard about global challenges such as climate change and the availability of quality land and water. But what does the EU do to face challenges such as food security? There is growing awareness among European consumers with regard to the need to be guaranteed a provision of safe food. This means that people in Europe want to ensure that wherever food comes from and wherever they buy it, it is safe and wholesome. A Europe-wide action to enforce standards among the 27 Member States is under way, but it is also evident that lately a major development has been taking place. Farmers in

the EU are constantly facing the challenge of products originating in third countries. Therefore their main driving force is to offer more 'quality' products, while European consumers have become more aware of the farm-to-fork concept.

During the 1990s, food security scares like Mad Cow disease, dioxin-contaminated feed and adulterated olive oil challenged EU food safety legislation. Such laws should serve as safeguards for consumers, while at the same time offer as much information as possible about potential risks and what is being done to minimise them. Since 1996, the European Commission has pushed forward a food security policy against hunger. The EuropeAid Cooperation Office also helps developing countries to feed their people. Keeping risks to a minimum through modern food and hygiene standards starts from a number of measures which should be taken on the farm itself. This applies both to food produced in the EU, as well as to that imported from third countries. The EU's goals promise not only a high level of food security, but also of animal health and welfare as well as plant health throughout the union through coherent farm-to-table measures.

Major changes to the CAP are expected to be introduced as of 2013. By then it is predicted that the Green Paper on agricultural product quality would have resulted in an appropriate legislative framework. ☺



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